

Presentation for the Aloha Community Library Association Board meeting of
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March, 2015 update: I shared this presentation with the library board hoping that my local library would have a strong Spanish selection on opening day. However, the Aloha Library was not ready to meet that need for various reasons. By making this paper public, I hope to raise awareness of the importance of serving our Hispanic community with a selection of literature that is sufficient to maintain a lifetime of reading at all ages.

I grew up surrounded by books. In my home we have always had a challenging and interesting collection. I used the libraries and bookstores in Argentina frequently, and intended to use the libraries in the United States... until I found that it was extremely rare to find any interesting and good books in Spanish in the library. This happened in Oregon and in Massachusetts. I tried the book stores. There wasn't much there either. I have had to develop my own collection by asking travelers to bring books when they visit, by buying a suitcase full of books when I travel, and by asking fellow translators for recommendations so I could buy books online.

As I have shared this frustration with other Hispanics they have generally agreed with me. I have met very few Hispanics who are truly satisfied with their local library collections. As a translator, I have found that speakers of other languages have the same frustration.

The libraries in our area attempt to deal with this issue and have a strong collection for preschool children. However, the collection for children 7 to 15 years old is lacking in many ways and the collection for adults is not sufficient to sustain life long reading. Since there are no other viable resources available for reading, school age children and adults do not continue to read in Spanish.

At this point, most of the Hispanics I have talked with are so frustrated that they simply do not even visit the library any more.

I would like the Aloha library to start in a good position to meet this very important need in the community. 25% of our population is at the mercy of the library for its book selection. There really is no other resource. They haven't been frustrated with our library yet. A strong collection on opening day, even if it may be limited, is very important to keep their hope alive and to energize this community. I would love to see the Aloha library provide a collection that is sufficient for life long reading.

My background

I learned how to read in Spanish before I started kindergarten in Newtown, PA. My mother's family has important ties to the history of Argentina, where I lived from the time I was 8 until I was 28. Then I spent 15 months visiting almost all countries of Latin America.

I have served the Hispanic community in the US as a freelance translator and interpreter for about 15 years. I have met a wide variety of people with limited English skills and have talked with them about their situations many times.

I volunteer with my church, and we have developed several programs:

- We have a vibrant English as a Second Language (ESL) program, and several students have left the classes because they are now able to work at a job.
- We have been providing books for children in Woodburn for years. Last year we gave a daycare center \$200 of books for children, so they could check them out and send them home on weekends as well as read them on site. This year we are donating \$500 of books for the project. These have been very effective.
- We have a series of culture conversations on an almost monthly basis at the day care center. Every month we cover a different topic about how to adjust to living in the United States. Members of both cultures participate in the conversation, and both groups have grown in understanding and friendship. Both groups want to keep the series going.

In the translation community, I have been nominated as Assistant Administrator of the Spanish division of the American Translators Association, partly because I suggest creative solutions to problems and encourage others to serve their community. I think translators and interpreters are uniquely qualified to bridge the culture gap and help both sides of the community engage with each other because we understand both sides very deeply.

Spanish community:

63% of the Hispanic population in the Oregon is Mexican. Nationally, over 50% of this group has completed 9th grade, and in the second generation the percentage of people who go to school after high school is 44%. This segment of the population truly encourages education in their children.

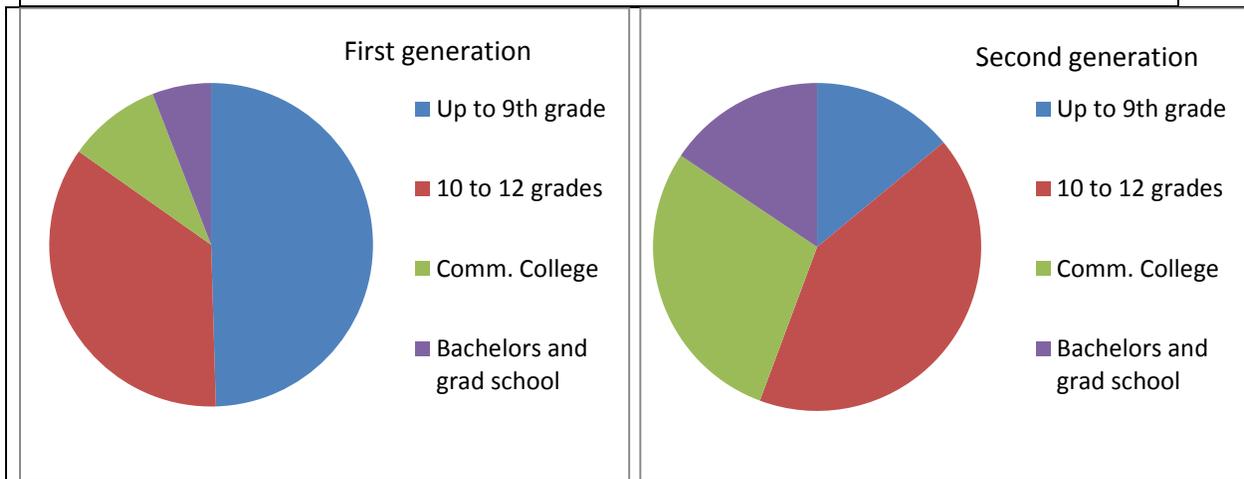
The poverty level of Mexicans in the United States is 22.1% to 23.3%. In 2010, the national percentage was 15.1%.

According to the US Census, the Hispanic population of the United States is composed of the following groups. Our collection should reflect this type of diversity, with representative authors from these regions.

Mexican	63%
Puerto Rican	9.2%
Cuban	3.5%
Other Hispanics	24.3%
Dominican Republic	2.8%

Population of Mexican origin that resides in the United States

Characteristics	First generation	Second generation	Third generation
Schooling			
Up to 9th grade	49.5 %	14.0 %	13.3 %
10 to 12 grades	35.2 %	41.7 %	45.2 %
Comm. College	9.3 %	28.7 %	28.4 %
Bachelors and grad school	5.9 %	15.6 %	13.2 %
Poverty level			
Poor	22.1 %	23.3 %	19.3 %
Not poor	77.9 %	76.7 %	80.7 %



Source: Estimates of CONAPO based on the Bureau of Census, Current Population Survey (CPS), March of 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2007.

Survey:

We have surveyed the Hispanic community in Aloha, and here are some of the highlights of what they want in a library:

- Spanish books (quality literature originally written in Spanish, new books for all ages)
- Spanish helpers
- Interests:
 - history
 - science
 - classics
 - children
 - how to help children in school
 - how to raise teenagers
 - health
 - self-improvement
 - how to overcome depression
 - volunteering
 - books in English and in Spanish for teens
- ESL
- Homework support
- Book club for Hispanic adolescents, so they can continue to develop their Spanish language skills. They want to grow in this area, but the school curriculum didn't meet the perceived needs of one teenager I spoke to. Other parents told me their children are no longer bilingual enough to read Spanish books. The library could make a significant difference here. These are the truly bilingual people of the future, and we can't afford to lose them.

I believe depression is a real issue in the Hispanic community, triggered in part by the very large separation between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. The library could be a place of healing through books and the opportunity to be truly involved in the community, working side by side as neighbors in a context of mutual respect that is not marred by politics. This sense of community will also help teens as they grow up. This hope is shared by others in the community.

Some stories:

- A woman approached me at the health fair and told me that she came to the United States to help her son focus on his college studies. To do so, she left a successful career as a nursing supervisor at a hospital in Venezuela. Today, she works as a cleaning lady because of her lack of English skills. She wants to work on her ESL education.
- As I was waiting to start an interpreting session for Hispanics in the Forest Grove school district, a Mexican woman approached me and told me her Spanish used to be as good as mine. However, since the library has not provided the quality of interesting books she needs, she has not read consistently in the last 15 years she has been here, and her literacy level has diminished significantly from her time in Mexico as executive secretary.
- Another woman who I met at the health fair has stage 4 breast cancer and came to the US for treatment. Her 11-year-old son is extremely bright, and they haven't found any books that have been appropriate to keep him challenged. They left with a very big smile when I loaned them three books.
- Maria, one of my ESL students in Woodburn, is an extremely dedicated woman. After coming to ESL for a year and a half, she spoke to me about increasing her Spanish literacy level. She only had access to school until 4th grade, and she wants to increase it so she can also approach English more effectively.
- Hispanics in the professional world also like to relax by playing Spanish music, eating Spanish food... and reading Spanish books. It is part of who we are, and we need this.

Everywhere I go, as soon as I approach Hispanics and ask them if they are interested in a library with quality books, they are interested. When I show my samples of what good books look like, they want to start borrowing them immediately, and ask "Where do you get this?" My answer: in Argentina, or in my travels.

We are a team.

Though I refer to myself, we are working as a team. I have talked with the librarian in our Library Board to learn from her and align our collection policies for the Hispanic community with the general policies of the ACLA, while being faithful to meet the needs of the community. Based on this, we will focus on good quality books in near new condition.

Others from the Hispanic community have joined with me to form a team and select books. I have assigned sections of 100 books of the catalog to different people, and we will be ready to present a list of desired books by early August. I also have asked members of the Woodburn community for their input, and have their priorities. As our team develops a shopping list from our catalogs, we learn what is of interest to the community.

We will focus on literature for the different age groups.

Preschoolers. The libraries in Shute Park and Forest Grove have strong collections, and we can learn from them.

Young readers: We need a combination of translations of books popular in the US and books originally written in Spanish, leaning towards a 40% translated from English and 60% originally in Spanish. I spoke with the Children's librarian in Forest Grove, and she observed that these translated books are often checked out by parents who want to know what their children are reading in English. This is an important service.

Adults: This needs to include books by popular authors of all Latin America including Mexico. Some suggestions made by Elizabeth Lopez, the Spanish librarian in Hillsboro, are authors Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez and Cesar Lozano, and books related to celebrities, such as La Reina del Sur, by Dr. Ana Maria Polo (biography of Selena).

Practical steps we can take as a library:

I believe it is important to have a strong collection and a visible commitment to Spanish literature from the first day. I would like to see a certain area of shelves designated for Spanish books, even if they are still empty, in the library on opening day. They could have a sign saying *something like: "Future home of the Spanish collection – to help us reach this goal, please donate to the library. Books cost an average of \$20."*

On June 30 I met with Hispanics to choose books, at my home. Three members of the community came to help. We established a process to choose books, talked about fundraising, and expect to have a preliminary selection of books made in a month. We began with the Alfaguara/Santillana children's and adult literature collections.

I have the full catalogs of Alfaguara (560 titles for youth and 1183 titles for adults) and the Fondo de Cultura Económico (2289 titles). Alfaguara specializes in literature for all ages, and is one of the largest Spanish language publishing houses. FCE specializes in making the Spanish culture accessible and affordable and has offered a 50% discount on all our purchases.

In early August we will be able to shop from these catalogs, based on available funds and team selection. I would like to recommend that the Board authorize an expenditure of \$1500 for this collection.

We can start to collect Spanish books and funds from the community. I would like to place book donation boxes in the places where Hispanics meet. Initially, we could placing them in churches and grocery stores that cater to Hispanics. These boxes could have a slot on the side for people to take a flier home with information on how to make a donation to the library for our collections. I would strongly encourage donations of multiples of \$20, since I estimate that would be the average cost of a book once we include shipping, processing, and other incidentals. **I recommend that the Board authorize the**

creation of a fund based on donations designated for Spanish books. This information would be featured in the flier that goes with the book donation boxes.

I have two shopping trips planned in conjunction with translation conventions. This will allow me to choose quality picture books for children and fill in some other gaps in our collection. I will also keep an eye out to support the other local libraries.

- The largest Spanish book fair in the world, in Guadalajara, Mexico, on Thanksgiving weekend. This fair happens in connection with one of the best translator conventions in Mexico, and lodging for the translators is sponsored by the book fair. I plan to be there... and shop for the library.
- The Fondo de Cultura Económico has a branch office in San Diego. They are offering a 50% discount. I will be there in the end of October for an ATA convention.

Spanish poetry and humor have their own special flavor. I have attempted to translate one of my favorite poems, by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. He lived in Seville from 1836 to 1870 and is a favorite in the entire Spanish-speaking world. This poem reminds me of the value of those we have neglected and ignored — not just within the Hispanic community! I think this applies to any human being.

Del salón en el ángulo oscuro,
de su dueño tal vez olvidada,
silenciosa y cubierta de polvo
veíase el arpa.

In a dark corner of a room,
probably forgotten by its owner,
silent and covered in dust,
a harp waited.

¡Cuánta nota dormía en sus cuerdas,
como el pájaro duerme en las ramas,
esperando la mano de nieve
que sabe arrancarlas!

How much music slept in its strings,
as the bird sleeps in the branches,
waiting for the snow white hand
that knows how to draw it!

¡Ay! – pensé -. ¡Cuántas veces el genio
así duerme en el fondo del alma,
y una voz, como Lázaro, espera
que le diga: “¡Levántate y anda!”

“Oh!” I thought. “How often genius
sleeps in the depth of the soul
and, like Lazarus, waits for a voice
to tell it, ‘Get up and walk!’”

— Rima número 7, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer; trans. Helen Eby

Acknowledgements:

I have appreciated the input of members of the Hispanic community from Aloha, Cornelius and around the United States as I have developed my plans and thoughts. I have tried to listen to their concerns and present them faithfully.